

# A STALK OF GRAIN AND LIGHT

## Excerpted from *O Resplandor*

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### Abstract

"Stalk of Grain and Light" is an excerpt from *O Resplandor* (Toronto: Anansi, forthcoming 2010), a book of poetry that explodes notions of authorship and translation. In it, the heteronymic character Elisa Sampedrín translates from Nichita Stănescu, though she knows no Romanian, and the orthonymic character Erín Moure translates Paul Celan, using not Celan but English transcreations from the language of Celan by Oana Avasilichioaei which she appropriates and reorganizes to create the true translation of a poem by Paul Celan, which exists only in her mind. In this world where corporations copyright human cells, where academics and libraries appropriate works of writers, and where writing itself — moreso than visual art — is limited by expanded notions of plagiarism and ownership, of continuity of copyright for decades that prevents works from influencing art's future, Moure refutes the idea that writing is inspired out of nowhere. Here it is rooted to human interaction, to love and loss, to the art of others, and is dedicated to creating a world where the free irruption of thought is possible, and lineages are acknowledged.

**Keywords:** poetics of translation, transcreation, authorship and heteronymy.

Ilha do Desterro	Florianópolis	nº 56	p. 033-050	jan./jun. 2009
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## "A Stalk of Grain and Light"

Excerpted from *O Resplendor*

by Erin Moure

(upcoming in February 2010 from Anansi, Toronto)

### I: Elisa Sampedrín:

I stood before the screen of my own language. There was no remedy. Either I stood before the original work in its incredible beauty or I stood before the screen of my own language. Before this screen, I had no recourse. Something had to be altered in my body, to compensate for the screen of my language that stood between me and the poem. I unsocked myself. I unshoed myself.

I was a stalk of grain and light.

\*

I was alone in Bucuresti. In its traffic. An absolute clamorous din. I had to change my face.

\*

When I first started translating Stănescu, I didn't know Romanian. "Albă" looked to me like "albumin," so I translated it as albumin. Later I found out it was the feminine of "white." Albumin then became even more accurate. Stănescu was urgently saying *albumin*. My mouth filled up utterly with this word. Something the same happened with all the others. Bucuresti. Why did I go there.

\*

*(after Chus Pato)*

— Do you know this is the ruin of translation if you go on like this?

— ...

— You only discover what is bad and foul about literature, don't you?

— ...

— And not only that...

— ...

\*

I can't explain why I was so suddenly drawn to translation. But surely it was the poems of Stănescu. In Bucuresti, in a bookstore, or in the street, the din. Or I was standing in a hallway, someone's hall (whose?) and slid the book off a shelf. It had such a worn cover, pale yellow. I intended to put it back the instant that feet sounded in the corridor. But when I gently opened the book, I saw cattle. An eyeful of cattle. Their field was steaming. It was after a rain. A man was hammering on a stone. He wasn't watching me at all, he was so intent. I heard feet then. The book slipped into my coat. One gesture. But my mouth hurt. I raised my eyes then and took the book out, and held it to the waiting woman. She turned to the shelf, then back to me without saying anything. I knew I had to translate it. I knew no Romanian. But I wanted to read the book, so I had to translate it.

There would be no surcease until I did so.

## **II: Erín Moure:**

I'd been reading translations all day, O.A.'s unpublished ones of Paul Celan from Romanian to English, translations that occurred in the space between poems, and... true, the line was not there. But when I looked

up, I had said it out loud. The line had formed itself in my mouth and I heard it spoken. What had I translated? I opened the window. How could I have translated something into English that was already in my own tongue? The echo of vehicles on stone walls. It was Celan. Early Celan. *There is an essential anachrony in our being exposed to the other at the moment of translation*, said Derrida (or not). "Contagious fire and hours that break all clocks."

\*

Each time, time's rupture must be admitted, for every translation destroys time. This is not "an impossible sentence with no meaning." It is the time or tense of all translation, all writing. Like the future anterior of the phrase "I died," all translation appears as a monster in time itself.

\*

"I told myself the following, which I feel with singular acuteness and intensity: if this interiorization is not possible, if it cannot — and this is the unbearable paradox of fidelity — be completed, it would not be because of a limit, a border that cannot be crossed, a frontier that encloses a given space, organizing finitude into an inside and outside homogeneous with one another, symmetrical and commensurable. It would be, rather, because of another organization of space and of visibility, of the gazing and the gazed upon." (Jacques Derrida, *Work on Mourning*, words underlined by E.S. in a book slipped into the library of E.M. by the window, beside bpNichol's *Translating Translating Apollinaire*.)

## Part-Elegy

*the roof between visceral and real*

What comes from afar,  
sent half-late and chilled  
rosy as dawn to my singularity.  
In cathedrals with pulse perceptible, half-late,  
swirling and absorbing the intrusion of belief,  
in an absurd circuit  
right in the zone of absurdity,  
raying with the sea drunk with moonlight,  
in the gold of what exists.  
The cinders of fury, nightly,  
luminous eyes sleeping,  
innumerable dints glow in the face taken up with sleep  
sharing the tunic  
seeding a plot of meteors  
on the street of light called *strada luminatã*  
urging and corroborating together.  
What comes from afar,  
sent half-late to me  
and  
my own properties now are too naked  
and much more intelligent  
my own properties too are enraged  
by a poet who exists and is leaving  
too, enraged.  
Astral,  
grabbing the last step of the insomniac stair  
in the evening of evening,  
yearning  
in the partial but unconjugated  
strata of ice,  
courting discards and

scuffling with insufficiency,  
vale  
of my care and my possibility of freedom  
unnegotiable  
with its possibility that all of this is a film, and over.

II

To be all bothered in myself with this rupture,  
accepting  
its rigours hugely, attuned to the procession  
that seems will endure.  
Endure and rupture in the gift of light,  
the pattern it prints on my eyes, aches.  
Endure and rupture in soaring  
light,  
the sound of loving bells, ache.  
Endure ruptured in ache  
in the mirrored sunlight,  
and what touches my nostril, ache.  
And you, oh you, remaking the entire inner world,  
you, possibly my twin, helping me  
imbricate the barbarity of the femur, yes,  
oh, you, and you, and you  
inhaling solemnly  
the ruptured twinship  
with flames of ash, detained by ash,  
the prow of your voyage lit up with my fire  
enrapt me,  
teaches me rigour, accepting,  
professing, throwing me into the lifeboat,  
teaching me rigour, over and over, to climb up again  
rugged, unold.

**“break simply with grief’s cane”**

... a “force renewed” through the very renunciation of all restitution,  
all reconstitution, all postmortem retribution:

the gift itself.

(J.D.)

---

the impossibility itself of the translation she was attempting. leaping into the map of Celan’s words with no instrument for scale, for not knowing the language she instead drank words. when she walked uphill the water followed her. because of O.A., Celan’s words had come to her in English, the language of no one. the language she herself could scarcely hold without it tremouring her. so she tried to make the instrument of equivalencies, of valence, of scale with the lines of the poems themselves:

*stained petal you extinguished* = *rose wrenching the shoulder light*

*slowly unfasten grief’s doves* = *with explorers of heightitude, the hands*

but she had mixed up gloves and doves.

**KEY TO READING “Two Accurate Translations of One and the Same Poem by Paul Celan”\***

impetuously beautiful = our single shipwreck, transparent

literally: impetuous shipwreck

sky's flag 

= one floor below us silica

literally: flag below us floor

stained petal you extinguished = rose wrenching the shoulder light

literally: shoulder petal extinguish rose

**\*this poem is a monstrosity, but not a lie.**

***"The human soul applies this excess of forces to the formation of language." Heymann Steinthal, 1851***

"The deportations began the following day." Paul Celan

**Two Accurate Translations of One and the Same  
Poem by Paul Celan**

**Great Southern Cross**

impetuously beautiful  
sky's flag  
stained petal you extinguished  
ash those nights  
stain its silver in blood  
blaze announce  
there, unspeakably

(when boat reaches shore, the oars stop

(no way to become trees again

(rose wrenching the shoulder dark

(panther gashed dawn

## **Tropic**

our single shipwreck, transparent  
one floor below us silica  
rose wrenching the shoulder light  
ash those nights  
kissed her incestuous  
blaze announce  
flood of light creasing the window

(I climbed one of the arms of light

(laid down oars to fathom

(boat-marks tugged into snow

(gaze vacant with walnuts save themselves

## Wing

ash those nights  
blaze renounce

"contagious fire and hours that break all clocks"

"slowly unfasten grief's doves"

their wing-harrows  
their salt tears

---

"she stepped over the threshold to face an eyelid"  
so that i could get up and breathe at ease,  
arrest the hour from time's conflagration

*a poem now to be assembled in any order, by anyone's hand*

- 4, "mourning drunk from a palm"  
staggers not a bit of it  
the palm opens clamour so leafed, rested
- 2, barefoot to be told  
steps rambles  
walk through the long brown grasses
- 1, "ash that night"  
(snow alight)
- 3, "but how it floats amidst grasses with outstretched wings!"  
Shoulder, face, wing:  
I *éclate* you out of the waters.

*encântame o recendo da menta nos teus dedos...*

(we travellers of images blind

(next to you: transform colour

my

*wing-harrow*

salt-

wether

loam,

azul

\*

(with explorers of heightitude

the hands

## Living Proof (original)

*this lexicon is Paul Celan's and Oana Avasilichioaei's, i arrested it.*

Boat, face, wing:  
night's blanket sewn up around her shoulders.

Our convulsive foam  
glove's nocturnal kiss:  
oar in the high birches enflamed

The palm's open clamour is  
leafed sky, rested  
barefoot to be told

steps brambles    *but what we know, blaze knows*  
"walk through the long brown grasses"  
"ash that night"  
(endure)

Tomorrow's laugh is autumn's walnut, touch today the dew  
"how it floats amidst grasses with outstretched wings"

~ break harrow ~ simply ~ grief's cane ~

## A Real Letter

### 17 xuño 2006, Calgarii, Alberta

Dragã O., I'm so interested in what arises in the present of the writing moment, in the blurring of the signatures. How this moment, loosened, immediately undoes or unties the signature. I feel, once I've written words and assigned them O., O.A., E.M. or have written across your words and signed them E.S., that I must give the texts over to you to enact your signature *à travers*, in whatever way your own present writing moment prompts you: as commentary, as new lines or liens in your own work. Writing is thus always already enacted, but moreso. There is continually a supplement and, like the halo, it is utterly unnecessary and utterly glowing there. Here. Every enactment or re-enactment of a signature is a staging, a "making-here" in space.

Yet we each are present as singularities in the text and the texts we create are at the same time our own, no matter how we sign them.

*Translation, signature.* The writing hand, long-fingered and supple, whose touch remakes an entire interior world.

Today, reading an online Scandinavian litmag of "experimental" work, I realized that I'm so uninterested in this construct continually dug up by other people in which "lyric" is split off and set up against "experiment." I can't even be bothered to protest it, for protest would just give it credence, in a way. I am interested in the signature and the mouth and throat. I am interested in how ear and throat receive language. Which gives me Bachmann and Beckett fully, which gives me your *razã de lunã* too. And Stãnescu.

What's strange to me I guess is how that false dichotomy only looks interesting (perhaps this is it, I am only guessing) from the interior of a monolingualism. Once other languages are part of the foment, the

dichotomy does not hold at all; there is but opening, opening. This opening is where we meet as poet-beings. And we get on with our work, which lets us both meet so richly, ever and repeatedly and anew. This "getting on with the work of language" is both lyric, and experiment. Deeply both. Yours, E.

